Arizona Vocational Education Accountability System

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Why Do We Need An Accountability System?

Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (Perkins III) emphasizes accountability and the need for a statewide system of accountability based on reliable and valid program performance data. The federal legislation requires state and local eligible recipients to annually evaluate and assess the performance of their vocational programs. Having a statewide accountability system enables the State and local school districts to do the following:

- Take charge of assessing their own performance;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in their systems;
- Produce evidence of what improvement strategies are and are not working; and
- Disseminate results to better inform the public about student learning and program performance.

What Principles Guide the Program Performance Assessment System?

Systems Thinking
- Understand where and how your work contributes to the organization.
- Know how to use data effectively, as it enhances your understanding of the interactions between program curriculum and student interaction.
- Understand key practices that affect performance, as this is essential to the program's continuous improvement.

Management by Data
- Choices and decisions must be based on valid and reliable data.
- Effective improvement occurs with the inclusion of a program assessment strategy.
- Assessment of current performance relies on objective criteria to determine what is going on and decide what improvements to make.
- Outcomes must be related to practices and inputs in order to effectively use performance data.
- Access to reliable data early in the teaching and learning process can minimize problems.

Continuous Improvement
- A stabilized, well-defined system, as well as, an assessment strategy is essential before setting improvement goals.
- Emphasis of effective design of programs, curricula and learning environment both for the student and faculty should be key areas for improvement.

How is Program Performance Evaluated?

The evaluation is conducted to determine if the program has reached its goals and assesses the program status within the educational organization. Two types of evaluation are used to provide information for continuous program improvement:

- Formative evaluation – provides information for program revision and refinement

- Summative evaluation – determines if the program has successfully met the goals that were established when the program was started

What Is The Purpose of the Local Program Assessment Guide?

The Arizona Department of Education staff will use the Local Program Assessment Guide (LPAG) in its evaluation of vocational programs with low performance results. The LPAG may be used as a formative or summative evaluation tool by school districts to guide inquiry and examination of current practices. The intended outcomes of a program assessment are to evaluate program success, improve learning and instruction, and certify individual student mastery.

Evaluate Program Success
- Clarify picture of the system the program is in.
- Gather information that allows the district to predict performance.
- Improve the system in a disciplined and systematic way.

Improve Learning and Instruction
- Evaluate the district's performance and guide planning and training.
- Improve the district's performance, practices and capabilities.

Certify Student Mastery
- Document student mastery of general and specific skills and abilities essential for employment.
- Enhance student transition from school to career

What Are The Benefits of Using The Local Program Assessment Guide?

Completing the LPAG will help a school district determine:

- How clearly aligned and widely applied the variety of choices are in the design and delivery of program instruction and learning.
- Whether the selected choices are contributing to or achieving performance targets.

Carl Perkins III requires the State to conduct an annual program assessment of the vocational and technical activities of each eligible recipient receiving funds under Perkins III. Results of the assessment are used to diagnose strengths and weaknesses of the program and provide information to design, develop and implement a local program improvement plan. In Arizona

this plan is referred to as a Continuous Accountability Plan (CAP) [Perkins III - Sec. 123 Improvement Plans].

In promoting Perkins III continuous improvement mandate [Perkins III - Sec. 113 Accountability], Arizona's State Plan requires districts to conduct an annual program performance evaluation of their vocational technical programs to determine the progress in achieving the state-adjusted levels of performance. Arizona's emphasis is on continuous program improvement that involves using performance data in setting performance goals, monitoring progress toward goal achievement and regular program evaluation.

Should a program not meet performance measures or not make substantial progress toward meeting the performance measures, the Arizona Department of Education is required to conduct an evaluation of the program. The Local Program Assessment Guide (LPAG) will be the basis for the Department of Education's evaluation.

What Are The Components of the Local Program Assessment Guide?

Pillars
Five elements—called pillars—have been identified for examination. Each pillar represents elements included in national education reform models for program improvement.

Items
Each pillar is organized into two to six related topics identified as *Items*. The *Items* focus the examination on a particular aspect of a Pillar. Through this focused examination, inquiry can be made and a systemic analysis of behavioral practices achieved.

Guiding Questions
Guiding Questions have been developed for each *Item*. *Guiding Questions* are a checklist for characteristics of quality programs. Each question includes a five-point scale representing a continuum of improvement practices. The teacher/director/local evaluation team member will indicate on the scale their assessment of the current practice and/or extent of the practice. Using this data for analysis of each continuum helps establish priorities and promotes goal setting for improved program performance.

Together, the *Items*, *Guiding Questions* and continuum scale form the framework for a diagnostic system for:
- Determining gaps in approach,
- Deployment and results,
- Encouraging cycles of learning and innovation, and
- Providing a driver and enabler for change.

The *Items* and *Guiding Questions* may also prompt additional questions from the evaluator or evaluation team to research deeper into their system.

The five pillars identified for program assessment and their descriptions follow:

Program Assessment, Information and Analysis
- Examination of the programs' performance measurement systems for understanding, aligning and improving program performance at all levels and all parts of the organization

Strategic Planning
- Examination of the district/school/programs' strategy development process including objectives, action plans and resource allocation
- Examination of the deployment of the plans
- Examination how performance is tracked

Staff Development
- Examination of how the district/school/department enables faculty to develop and utilize their full potential aligned with the organization's objectives
- Examination of the efforts to build and maintain a supportive work environment conducive to faculty and staff performance excellence
- Examination of alignment of resources that support knowledge of the content discipline, student learning styles and assessment methods

Contextual and Experiential Learning
- Examination of the extent to which students participate in work-based and school-based instruction including knowledge and skills required for college entrance and pursuing careers
- Examination of the workplace environment being linked to the in-school curricula

Rigorous Vocational Technical Education and Academic Studies
- Examination of how academic and vocational technical education curricula incorporate a purposely developed and articulated program of studies
- Examination of curriculum design to ensure high levels of achievement for all students for personal growth, citizenship development, preparation for work, higher education and life-long learning

Where Do We Begin?
First, adopt the vision of using data for improvement purposes. Consider what kinds of data are useful. The data you collect should provide relevant information important to the school/district/state program's mission and goals.

Before assembling an improvement team, you must decide the level you want to analyze. Possible choices include:
- Requesting an individual teacher evaluate his/her program;
- Inviting a cadre of teachers from the same school to evaluate their program;
- Gathering a cadre of teachers from the whole district to evaluate their program; and
- Assembling a local evaluation team to evaluate a program.

The LPAG is a suitable tool for each choice. It can be completed for all levels of analysis, and the information summarized to create a composite picture of program practices. The process encourages you to add data about other key education outcomes, practices and inputs which in your professional adjustment and experience are important. Such data should include your recent Performance Measures results and benchmarks important to your district/school/program.

Assemble the program improvement team(s). Team members should represent groups responsible for implementing improvement efforts or who have an investment or stake in the results of the program's performance. Perkins III specifies populations members of the annual evaluation team will represent, but not be limited to at least one representative from each of the following groups:

> Parents of currently enrolled students or recent graduates
> Currently enrolled student or recent graduate
> Vocational education teacher from program area
> Member from the business and industry the program reflects
> Labor organizations
> Representative of special populations
> Other interested individuals such as government, nonprofit youth service providers or workforce development representatives

Designate a local evaluation coordinator. The local evaluation coordinator will lead the team in implementing the following evaluation procedures:
- Review data for each performance measure for all programs.
- Review summary data from the Local Program Assessment Guide.
- Select and prioritize program improvement recommendations and strategies.
- Identify the needed resources to be allocated to support the short-term and longer-term improvement activities.
- Develop a written program Continuous Accountability Plan (CAP).
- Implement the CAP.
- Conduct regular periodic evaluations of progress toward performance goals.

How Can Continuous Program Improvement Be Sustained?

What follows is a proven six-step approach to implementing and sustaining continuous program improvement:

1. Have a clear understanding what the State goals are and decide what the local program goals will be and then let this decision drive the performance measurement system. Data collection needs to focus on information that is relevant to the identified goals. This information will be used to monitor performance and diagnose progress toward desired goals.

2. Identify related instructional and learning outcomes, practices and inputs. This step will help in examining the relationship between practices, inputs and outcomes. Most schools track outcomes without collecting data on related practices and inputs, which limits their ability to explain the reason for the outcomes.

3. Determine data sources and indicators to measure how you are performing on the goals. Developing new data sources is expensive so investigate what exists already. Ensure the quality of the performance measurement system by examining the following six criteria:

> Validity
> Reliability
> Fairness
> Cost effectiveness
> System focused
> Management utility

4. Examine the data to enrich your understanding of the program's performance. Data analysis does not need to involve complex statistics, but should include concrete examples.

5. Set performance targets. These targets are a means for measuring progress if they are specific and measurable. Setting targets involves:
   - Knowing how the program is currently performing (Where does the data come from, how the data are compiled and how they translate into concrete examples of student performance)
   - Gathering comparative information from external sources to assure target is externally valid
   - Identifying your level of satisfaction with your current performance

   Once targets are set, decide how to achieve them by developing improvement strategies.

6. A dynamic system continues to produce useful information over time and changes, as information needs changing. Measure progress from baseline performance toward performance targets. Collect, report and examine data periodically.
   - Set priorities among on-going data collection efforts.
   - Determine frequency of data collection and analysis.
   - Decide how to store the data.
   - Assign roles and responsibilities for key tasks.

The system will produce performance data that you want to communicate to program stakeholders on a regular basis. Revisit the six steps to ensure the system continues to produce useful and relevant information.

What To Consider In Developing A Local Program Continuous Accountability Plan?

In contrast to previous years, the program's Continuous Accountability Plan (CAP) is not a single document. Instead the CAP is the cumulative *local process* of evaluating program performance and planning for improvement. The new Arizona accountability system does not prescribe either the method or sequence of local evaluation activities. The actual design of the local process belongs at the local level. However, in general the State expects the local process will involve:
- evaluating local performance using the Performance Measures reports;

- assessing local practices within the context of the larger organization
  (the Local Program Assessment Guide is one example of how this can be done at the local level);
- prioritizing opportunities for improvement;
- planning improvement activities;
- implementing improvements and
- monitoring results and adjusting

Within the context of the new Arizona Accountability system, a ***successful*** local process will be characterized by:
- using both Performance Measures reports and the local assessment results to create a composite description of the program's performance and practices;
- relating the program's composite description to the larger organization and considering how each influences the other;
- prioritizing the opportunities for improvement in light of these systemic influences;
- turning the opportunities for improvement into concrete activities that are
  - manageable in size, scope and time,
  - measurable,
  - can be monitored;
- documenting what these planned activities are, who is responsible for them, how they will be measured, and when they will be monitored.

Local Evaluation Team members contribute to the local process when they:
- identify and bring people with a stake in the program's performance into the local process;
- determine how to ensure everyone at all levels will understand what is and what is not important to achieve improvement and
- recognize and share successful program improvements.

In this way, a successful local evaluation process contributes to Arizona's accountability system by using performance data to set performance goals, monitoring progress toward goal achievement, and establishing a cycle for local program evaluation and continuous improvement.

Begin with the end clearly in mind –
measurable continuous program improvements ensure measurable continuous student achievement.

RESOURCES

GLOSSARY

ACCOUNTABILITY ASSESSMENT PLAN
A plan based upon the findings of an external assessment directed by ADE of the Vocational Technical Education program which failed to meet the expected state levels of performance.

BENCHMARK
A criterion by which something can be measured or judged.

CONTINUOUS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN
A local plan resulting from the annual evaluation of the vocational technical education program. The plan identifies activities, services, and functions to be carried out to develop, support, and improve the quality of the vocational technical education program in achieving the state adjusted levels of performance.

LOCAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT GUIDE
The assessment instrument to be used by ADE to evaluate district vocational technical education programs that do not achieve the state adjusted levels of performance. The guide is intended to assist in the development of the Accountability Assessment Plan .

PROCESSES
A systematic sequence of action used to combine resources to produce an output.

PROGRAM EVALUATION
The systematic investigation of the worth or merit of a program.

SCHOOL INPUTS
Resources you have to work with, including students, staff, community support, physical plant, equipment and budget. Since many resources are relatively fixed, they are likely to influence the set of practices that are appropriate and the outcomes that are achievable in the short term.

SCHOOL PRACTICES
Strategies adopted to achieve or improve your targeted student outcomes, including curriculum, instruction, assessment methods and supporting structures.

STUDENT OUTCOMES
What you want students to know, think, believe, value, achieve or be able to do—the ultimate objective of schooling.

STAKEHOLDER(S)
A person or persons who have an investment in the successful outcomes of the program. Perkins III identifies such members as but not limited to at least one representative from each of the following groups:
- Parents of currently enrolled students or recent graduates
- Currently enrolled VTE student or recent graduate
- Vocational education teacher from program area
- Representative from business and industry

- Labor organizations
- Other interested individuals such as government, nonprofit youth service providers or workforce development representatives

SYSTEM

A system is a group of interrelated components designed collectively to achieve a desired goal. Systems' thinking involves understanding how a whole is expressed in terms of its parts and conversely, how the parts relate to each other and to the whole.

6 Step Cycle

Monitor Performance over time

Establish Goals

Set Performance Targets

Identify related outcomes, practices and inputs

Examine Data, Baseline and other

Determine data sources and indicators
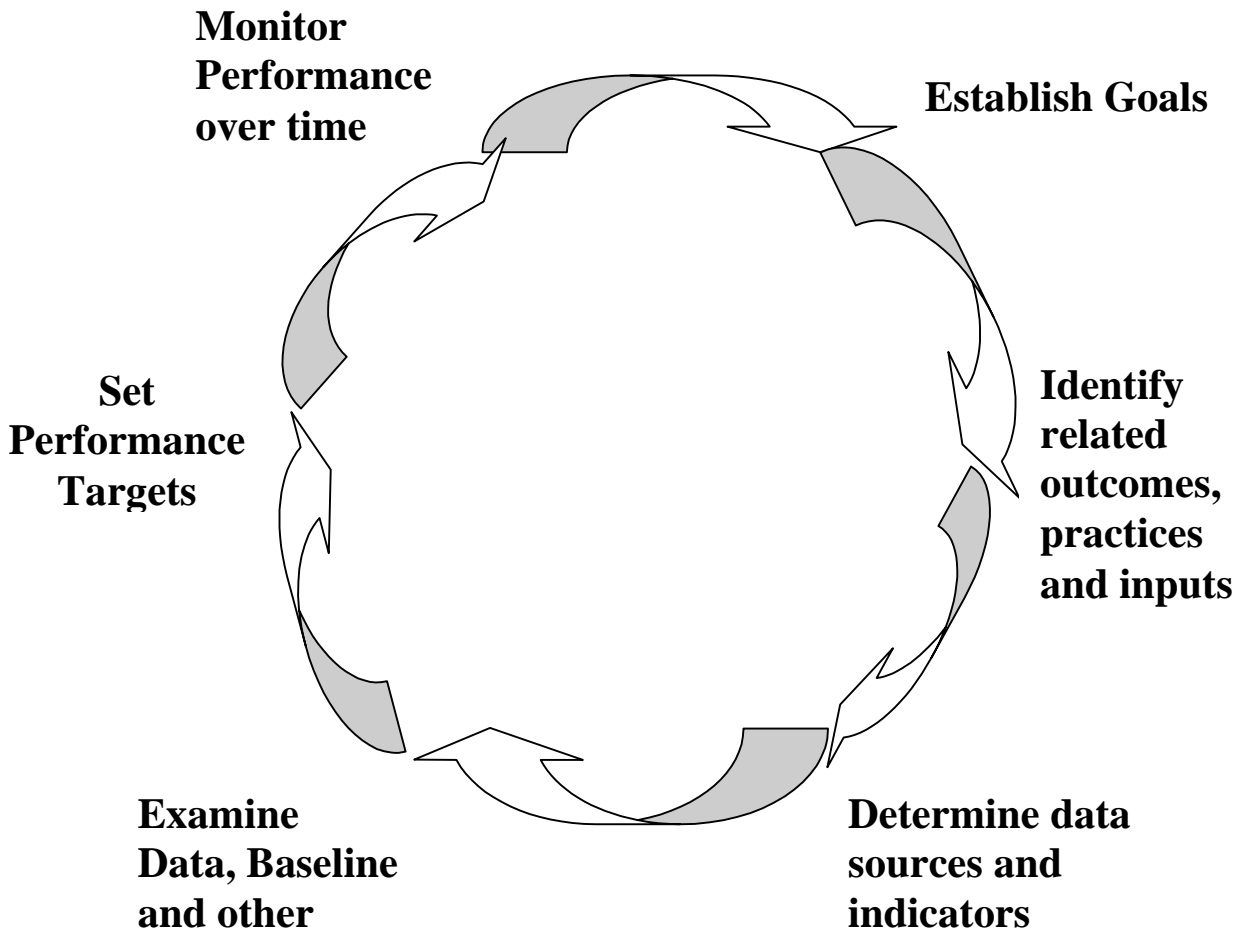
PROGRAM PRACTICES
COMPOSITE ANALYSIS

School: _____
Program: _____

PILLAR: Program Assessment, Information & Analysis

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5
	4.	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
2.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
3.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5

PILLAR: Strategic Planning

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5
	4.	1	2	3	4	5
	5.	1	2	3	4	5
	6.	1	2	3	4	5
	7.	1	2	3	4	5

PILLAR: Staff Development

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5
	4.	1	2	3	4	5
	5.	1	2	3	4	5
	6.	1	2	3	4	5

PILLAR: Contextual and Experiential Learning

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5
	4.	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
2.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5
	4.	1	2	3	4	5

PILLAR: VTE and Academic Studies

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5
	4.	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
2.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5

Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
3.	1.	1	2	3	4	5

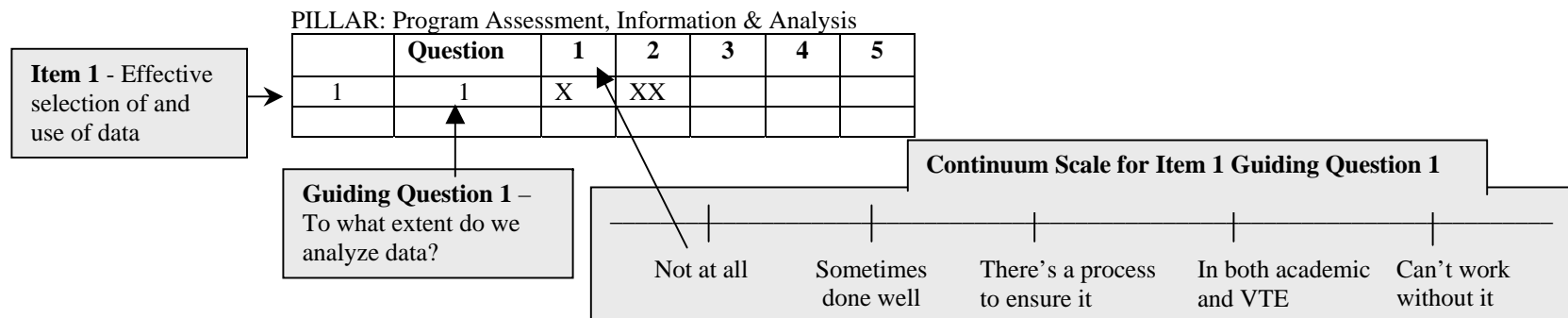| Item	Question	1	2	3	4	5
4.	1.	1	2	3	4	5
	2.	1	2	3	4	5
	3.	1	2	3	4	5

SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON REVERSE SIDE

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PROGRAM PRACTICES COMPOSITE ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

It is possible to have more than one person use the Local Program Assessment Guide to assess local programs. Therefore, it may be necessary to compile the separate assessments into one. The Program Practices Composite Analysis template is one example of how separate assessments can be combined.
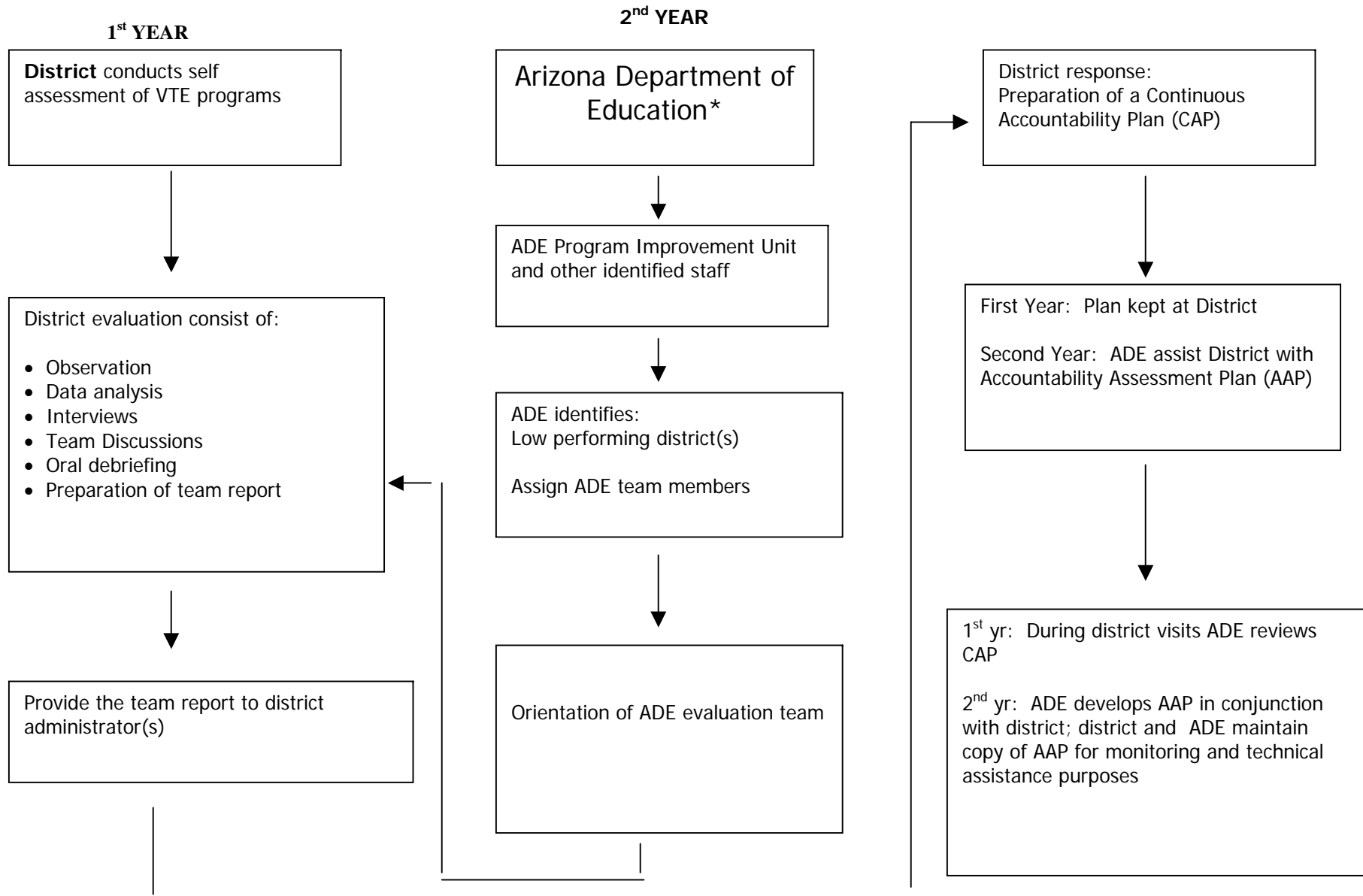
In order to get the composite information on a single page, the template abbreviates the recorded information from the Local Program Assessment Guide.
- The Pillar description heads each section.
- The actual Item descriptions and Guiding Questions are abbreviated with their identifying numbers.
- The scale of continuum for each Guiding Question is represented as the numbers 1 through 5, with the number 1 referring to the left end of the continuum scale and the number 5 to the right end of the continuum scale (considered the benchmark).
- This allows placing an X on the continuum from each separate assessment.

In this way, it is possible to see at a glance for all pillars of performance how many assessments you have and whether local practice approaches each benchmark. The gap between your local assessment marks and the benchmark at the right reveals an opportunity for improvement. Assessment marks that do not agree with one another require further discussion of the actual evidence considered in answering the Guiding Question.

PILLAR: Program Assessment, Information & Analysis

	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	1	X	XX			

Item 1 - Effective selection of and use of data

Guiding Question 1 – To what extent do we analyze data?

Continuum Scale for Item 1 Guiding Question 1

Not at all Sometimes done well There's a process to ensure it In both academic and VTE Can't work without it

FLOWCHART OF LOCAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

1st YEAR

2nd YEAR

District conducts self assessment of VTE programs

↓

District evaluation consist of: • Observation • Data analysis • Interviews • Team Discussions • Oral debriefing • Preparation of team report

↓

Provide the team report to district administrator(s)

Arizona Department of Education*

↓

ADE Program Improvement Unit and other identified staff

↓

ADE identifies: Low performing district(s) Assign ADE team members

↓

Orientation of ADE evaluation team

District response: Preparation of a Continuous Accountability Plan (CAP)

↓

First Year: Plan kept at District Second Year: ADE assist District with Accountability Assessment Plan (AAP)

↓

1st yr: During district visits ADE reviews CAP 2nd yr: ADE develops AAP in conjunction with district; district and ADE maintain copy of AAP for monitoring and technical assistance purposes

*Beginning the first year, ADE conducts data analysis of districts' performance and provides technical assistance

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